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Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
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Saskatchewan

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Log Number: 07-25-114
Week of June 18, 2007

CONFERENCE BOARD REPORT FINDS PROMISE IN LIFE SCIENCES

A study conducted by the Conference Board of Canada for Ag-West Bio Inc. has concluded that Saskatchewan—already a national leader in the life sciences sector—can become a significant global player.

The sector refers to the science and technology being developed to transform renewable feedstocks such as agricultural and forestry materials into new sources of energy, industrial products, health-related products and other products or services.

The study was funded by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, Saskatchewan Industry and Resources, the Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority, Western Economic Diversification, and Industry Canada.

Ag-West Bio Inc. President and CEO Dr. Ashley O'Sullivan says the study is intended to give focus to life science efforts in the province.

"The province needs a strategic direction to understand where the opportunities are in the emerging bio-economy," O'Sullivan said. "We need to know what our comparative strengths are and how we can build on those."

The study was conducted through consultations and surveys with over 100 life science leaders in Saskatchewan, including representatives of business, producer organizations, and the research community.

"They also looked at other jurisdictions and their strengths compared to ours," said O'Sullivan. "So it's not just a look at Saskatchewan, it's a look at Saskatchewan in the context of other jurisdictions and their capacities, as well."

The Conference Board report comprises a Life Sciences Strategy for Saskatchewan, with a list of 20 recommendations aimed at establishing an industry-led biofuels and bioproducts centre to champion the industry within the province and enable world-leading research and commercialization efforts.

(more)

The strategy indicates that Saskatchewan should focus on a few key areas of development in life sciences. It deals with the substantial capacity that already exists to convert crops and forests into biofuels and other products.

"Obviously for Ag-West, the whole area of bioproducts and biofuels is an important area. We're moving ahead with that right away in the sense that we're looking at doing an analysis of what the sector should look like and working with stakeholders to make that happen," O'Sullivan said.

In addition, the strategy looks at Saskatchewan's opportunities to take a leadership role in developing products in the nutrition, health and wellness sector for both humans and animals. These include food and feed with added nutritional value, functional foods, natural health products and nutraceuticals.

The study also highlights the large supporting sector of the highly-respected research community, and a number of early-stage companies in Saskatchewan working in the areas of immunology and vaccines. It discusses assets such as the Canadian Light Source Synchrotron, the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization, and the National Research Council's Plant Biotechnology Institute, among others.

Dr. O'Sullivan says that plans have already begun to put the Life Sciences Strategy recommendations into action.

"We have a steering committee that was established to oversee this process, and we've had one meeting to look at the recommendations in terms of who would be best to deliver on what," he noted. "The strength here is that the steering committee also involves different levels of government, so they are an important part of it, too."

A copy of the Life Sciences Strategy report is available at www.agwest.sk.ca.

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NEW PRESIDENT AT THE HELM OF NEW BIOFUELS COUNCIL

She says the challenges are many, but so are the opportunities.

Judie Dyck, the new president of the Saskatchewan Biofuels Development Council (SBDC), is optimistic about the future of the industry in Saskatchewan, but realistic about the work ahead.

An agrologist and past co-chair of the Saskatchewan Biodiesel Task Force, Dyck says the SBDC will bring the efforts to build an ethanol and biodiesel industry in Saskatchewan under one umbrella organization.

She feels there are a number of advantages to combining the two efforts, beyond the cost savings of having just one organization spearheading the effort.

"I think it was good to initially keep things separate, because there are some differences between ethanol and biodiesel, and the industries were at different stages. Ethanol is much further ahead than biodiesel," Dyck noted.

"However, it now makes sense to pull them together. There are only so many associations and so many resources and, for example, when you are dealing with government, you can now approach them as a single entity with a consistent message."

The SBDC is the successor of the Saskatchewan Ethanol Development Council.

"The SBDC's goal is to develop an inclusive and comprehensive biofuels industry that employs a diversity of feedstock and technologies towards establishing Saskatchewan as a leader in biofuels production in Canada," Dyck explained.

She says there is no shortage of tasks ahead for the new organization.

"I look forward to the new challenge and working with both industries, pulling them both under one umbrella and moving them forward. I am very passionate about the industry and I think there are still a lot of opportunities," Dyck said. "There is a lot of hard work ahead, too. But if it was easy, everybody would be doing it."

(more)

Those challenges include finding new markets beyond our own borders.

"If you look at ethanol, the three existing plants we have already meet the Saskatchewan mandate, so we will have to be looking for markets outside the province," she stated. "That is critical, because if you don't have the ability to market the product, you are going to have a hard time going to the bank."

On the biodiesel side of the equation, Dyck is confident that construction of new plants will get underway by next year.

"There is interest in building biodiesel plants in this province. The feasibility studies will dictate what the producers will be able to build, and their ability to market will dictate the size," she said.

"One of the challenges is that the players are all at different stages. Some are just starting and other groups are already raising capital. It's an enormous task, but we are well on our way."

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GRAZING TOUR COMING TO STOCKHOLM

The Pheasant Hills Grazing Tour will be taking place in Stockholm on July 4 and 5, offering tours, workshops, panel discussions, a trade show, and terrific entertainment to those wishing to attend.

Consistent with the tour's theme, "Bringing Youth into Ranching," the two-day event is being offered free of charge to anyone 18 years of age and under. The registration fee for adults is $30 for a single day or $40 for both days, which includes the full program and meals.

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) Livestock Development Specialist Naomi Paley says organizers wanted to particularly focus on getting the younger generations involved in the event, in addition to those already established in the cattle industry.

"The average age of our farmers is now over 50 years old, and wanting to make sure that agriculture is a viable and desirable career option for their children is something that we often hear from the current generation of producers and ranchers. So we wanted to make that a special focus of this year's grazing tour," Paley said.

"We've even built some sessions into the program that focus specifically on strategies for assisting young producers to get established in ranching, or setting them up to take over an existing operation from their parents."

To better enable those with younger farm families to attend, children's activities (non-supervised) have also been arranged for kids five years old and up.

A number of practical aspects of cattle production and grazing will be discussed over the two days through presentations and tours, including alfalfa and forage rotations, grass establishment, bale grazing, switching fields from grain to grass, winter feeding options, and watering cattle through deep and shallow buried pipelines.

In addition, speakers will conduct information sessions on important business topics, such as succession planning and financial transition options for outgoing and incoming generations of ranchers, as well as what investors look for when partnering with young entrepreneurs.

(more)

Concurrent workshops will also be held in areas such as fencing, working with stock dogs, intensive grazing management, forages and soil health, cattle marketing, and investors working with youth.

Paley says that participants will have a chance to hear from a range of experts in various fields, coming from the local area, other Prairie provinces, and even neighbouring states.

"The speakers that have been lined up are producers and ranchers themselves, or have a lot of practical experience in the agricultural industry," she stated. "So those attending will have a great opportunity to hear from people just like them who have actual hands-on experience in grazing, cattle production and agri-business."

Part of the social aspect of the event will be an evening entertainment and jam session with local musicians that will be featured after supper on July 4.

The events occurring as part of the grazing tour will be based out of the Stockholm Skating Rink. Those interested in learning more about the program can contact Naomi Paley at (306) 786-1686, Stuart Cairns with Ducks Unlimited Canada at (306) 782-2108, or the Yellowhead Regional Economic Development Authority (REDA) at (306) 743-5176.

Registrations are also being handled through the REDA. Participants are encouraged to register early, as space is limited.

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LITERACY SUPPORT HELPS RURAL COMMUNITIES FLOURISH

Literacy support programs can help rural communities attract and retain immigrants to build a stronger labour force in their manufacturing and agricultural industries.

With an increase in the immigrant population coming to Saskatchewan, there is a need to offer many services to these families, including literacy support.

Shaun Haskey is a Community Literacy Co-ordinator for the Humboldt Region with the SaskSmart Literacy Project. She says that setting up literacy programs in Saskatchewan communities will specifically address two areas of concern.

First, it will address the needs of the immigrant population moving into rural communities to work in the province's manufacturing and agricultural industries. "These families usually have English as a Second Language (ESL) challenges because they come from countries such as the Ukraine, China, and the Philippines," Haskey stated. "We want to provide support services for them, and literacy is certainly one of them."

Second, it will address the need to develop the potential in Saskatchewan's existing labour force. "There is always an opportunity to provide support to adults who would like to improve their reading and writing skills so that they are better suited for the workforce," she added.

The SaskSmart Literacy Project is focused on setting up literacy programs in various communities around the province.

"The biggest need in the Humboldt region specifically is for the immigrant families that are coming into the area. My job was to identify what the literacy needs were, to recognize gaps in the existing literacy services in our communities, and to set up a volunteer tutor network to help address those issues."

One of the goals of the project was to recruit volunteers in the region who might be interested in working one-on-one with other adults. "In this manner, we look to partner people who need help with their reading or writing skills, whether they are immigrants or adults in the community wanting to improve their literacy skills. We also focus on conversation skills for ESL adults."

(more)

Haskey says the work done through the SaskSmart project to develop the viable workforce and improve the literacy levels of immigrant workers coming to the province is benefitting on Saskatchewan's rural and farming sectors.

"These literacy programs allow immigrants to experience a smoother transition into our culture. They ensure that we are better able to support them so that they remain in our rural communities while working in our agriculture industry," she noted.

Immigrants bring several opportunities to small-town Saskatchewan, the biggest being an addition to the labour force in areas that have experienced chronic shortages. They also provide a means to revitalize rural communities that have perhaps experienced population declines.

But Haskey says is it is important for rural communities to set up support systems and services for immigrant families if they hope to not only attract, but retain newcomers.

"We want immigrants to stay in our rural communities. We don't want them to be lured away by the services that are available in bigger centres. To make this a reality, services need to exist in the rural communities so that the needs of immigrants will be met and they will be comfortable with having a future in our small towns."

Volunteers who might be interested in helping out with the SaskSmart initiative can get involved by contacting Shaun Haskey at (306) 231-6596. "We provide training to our tutors, as well as ongoing support," she said. "But we are also looking for those interested in being on the learning side of the equation. Those who would like some help with their reading and writing skills can also contact me."

Haskey feels the work being done through the project holds a lot of potential for the future of the province. "We have a tremendous opportunity to bring in a new wave of immigration and to revitalize and repopulate our rural communities," she stated. "I think we have a great opportunity to get it right, to provide support services and to create an environment that immigrants are going to want to stay in and be a part of."

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YORKTON'S ANNUAL SUMMER FAIR: 124 YEARS OF ENJOYMENT

The Yorkton Exhibition and Summer Fair celebrates 124 years of agricultural and entertainment excellence this year. The 2007 edition will be held from July 4 to 7.

The annual four-day event will take over the Gallagher Centre and exhibition grounds. It will include such crowd-pleasers as the midway, nightly entertainment in front of the grandstand, horse racing, cattle shows and sales, and a wide variety of commercial exhibits and sales booths.

"The Exhibition and Summer Fair started out as an agricultural society and has grown up with the town through the years since then. It has been around for a long, long time," said Don Kunkel, the General Manager of the Yorkton Exhibition and Gallagher Centre.

"This year marks the 125th anniversary of the settlement of Yorkton, and the fair has been around one year shy of that. So it is a big part of Yorkton's history."

Kunkel says the Yorkton Exhibition started out as most other fairs did in those days, "as a gathering point for rural folks to exchange farming ideas and practices." It then evolved into a venue to compare farm practices and included livestock shows. From there, it progressed to incorporate entertainment attractions.

While organizers today try to ensure that a wide variety of entertainment is featured at the event, they still work hard to uphold the program's agricultural flare. "Although most summer fairs are now more entertainment-oriented then they are agricultural-oriented, we still try to maintain that agricultural component," Kunkel noted.

"We host a large 4-H Regional Beef Show and Sale in conjunction with our Summer Fair. We have a 4-H horse show, a miniature horse show, and a boar and dairy goat show that all tie into the agricultural component. We also have chuck wagon and chariot races, as well as standard-bred horse racing all at the same time."

The event's ties with the 4-H organization have become particularly strong over the years. The group's Beef Show and Sale has been an annual component of the Yorkton Exhibition for roughly 30 years now.

(more)

Kunkel says the timing and history of the event always make it a popular draw, and he expects that to continue again this year. "Since everybody goes to their local exhibition in the summer, we are expecting another large turnout. There will be a million different things to do and a million different things to see," he stated.

The annual fair is organized and hosted by the Yorkton Exhibition Association. More details surrounding the event's program and activities will be made available as the date approaches. Additional information can also be obtained by calling the Exhibition office at (306) 783-4800 or searching the Gallagher Centre website at www.gallaghercentre.com.

Inquiries about booking commercial booth space can likewise be forwarded to the Yorkton Exhibition Association at (306) 783-4800.

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